

LACER

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM'S ROCK BAND WORKSHOP

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LACER'S ARTSTARS

Founded in 1995, the LACER Afterschool Program's primary goal is to provide opportunities in the arts to youth in Los Angeles. LACER's free, high-quality workshops are taught by professionals in their field, include a snack every day and are enjoyed by over 2,500 students in Los Angeles each year.



Now in our fifteenth year, students who attend LACER's middle school and high school campuses choose from a wide variety of daily offerings

including a cutting edge homework assistance program, athletics, cooking, field trips as well as our award-winning offerings in the arts (Music, Visual Arts, Theater and Dance).

Within LACER's Nationally recognized (Coming Up Taller Award) Programming students create and participate in plays, art shows, concerts, recitals, dance competitions, and performances in big and small venues for parents, peers, and the community.



The Rock Band Workshop is one of the choices in the arts that is offered twice a week and has been particularly successful. Students have found an interest in music that they didn't know they

had with this opportunity to explore rock instruments, to actually learn how to play at least one, learn how to practice, how to rehearse with a group, and then play as a band for audiences small and large.

THE ROCK BAND PROJECT

The Rock Band Class at LeConte Middle School for which the California Art Council's Artists in Schools Grant was awarded, along with matching funds from The Flourish Foundation, has been particularly successful. Instructors Lisa Marie Maestas and Tracey Singleton, both professional musicians, have hit all the right notes with the youth, filling their workshop to capacity.

The workshop is organized as a series of classes, twice a week, where students with or without previous experience can build the skills needed to play at least one

instrument. While students can explore many instruments, they select one to start learning to proficiency first. Students bring in song ideas to share with the band, pop tunes, folk songs, as well as songs they've heard their parents and family listen to. In small group sessions, and large full-group rehearsals students learn to play as many as 7 to 9 songs in as many months, often playing multiple instruments.



In April 2010 the LeConte Rock Band started the process of traveling to the other LACER sites to play short concerts for each other. Students shared each of the songs they had learned so far, demonstrated their performance skills, and most especially, they met other like-minded music students in the LACER program. Traveling from school to school offered

our participants a few things we couldn't accomplish if we were to stay at one site. It gave our Hollywood area students a window into different communities across Los Angeles and we found our students claim common ground in song choices, interest in their instruments, LACER's music program, and respect for their instructors. The visits to Fairfax and Hollywood High Schools were very exciting for the students. They made quick friends during their field trips and there was a great deal of discussion about campus life and what to expect when they get there. As a result, many of the middle school students began making choices about where they would like to go to high school.

Also, hearing other student bands gave them all a unique lesson in how this material can sound live, the kind of musicianship they can strive for, and were able to see what kind of performance level they needed to strive for to grab the attention of an audience. As each show came to a close the students' skills had grown measurably.

In May, the LeConte administration was in search of an exciting way to reward their students' good work



during the school's testing period. Knowing LACER's Rock Band Project was on their campus, they organized a full day of assemblies for the Rock Band to play for the student body.

Needless to say, this was an awesome opportunity. In order

to accommodate the 21-member rock band, we organized the band using two drum kits, four electric guitars, four bass guitars, two keyboards and up to eight vocalists. The school staff attending encouraged the audience to have a great time – led by the assistant principal; dancing up and down the isles! Many of our students' parents attended these student shows, and assisted with food donations throughout the year and offered to drive when we traveled to the other sites.

By the end of that day, the band (KOL - Kids of LACER) performed four 50-minute concerts for a total of 1,450 students. The set list included modern pop music as well as songs from the 1980s songbook including "Imagine," "We Will Rock You," "Wild Thing," "Seven Nation Army," "Anything, Anything," and many more.

I am so impressed by the commitment and growth of the students. All of them worked hard to learn their

instrument of choice and were willing to be a part of the collaborative thing that became 'the band.' They learned the ins



and outs of setting up and breaking down, some found they had amazing vocal skills, others showed great ability with a guitar or drums and still others found they were announcers, producers and sound-mixers. Most of all, I was impressed that they wanted the class so much. Three grade levels, boys and girls, all the cultures and languages that make-up Los Angeles, showed an impressive willingness to collaborate.

We are looking forward to launching the 2010-11 school year. The rock bands will continue to grow and the returning participants will gain further skills. Cheers to the California Arts Council for their continued commitment to providing an opportunity for artists in California to teach, inspire youth and adults and to share their art. It's thrilling for me to be a part of the process and to see the rewards. Come for a visit next time you're in Los Angeles, I'll show you our Rock Band. They will ROCK YOU!

All photos by Will Seymour

LACER receives funding from the California Arts Council's [Artists in Schools Program](#), which supports residencies in schools, and is managed by Wayne Cook Wcook@cac.ca.gov.